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ABSTRACT

Increasingly, those individuals and institutions working with teachers-to-be are assuming responsibility for the performance of their graduates. One measure of an undergraduate teacher education program is the perceptions of its graduates. In studies using G. Thomas Baer's questionnaire for program evaluation, several recurring themes or common grievances were voiced by graduates. Some of these include the following: (a) courses and experiences that provided opportunities for observing and working with children were valued most highly; (b) student teaching was rated as the course or experience of greatest value; (c) graduates felt completely unprepared for the teaching ecology, sex education, and drug education; (d) the need for more and better instruction in the teaching of reading, science, and social studies was pronounced; (e) graduates felt better prepared to identify and meet the needs of average students than gifted or slow students; (f) student teaching at more than one grade level would have been of greater value; and (g) graduates felt that only about one-third of their professional education instructors usually used a variety of teaching methods and procedures. (PB)

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TEACHER PREPARATION--WHAT GRADUATES TELL US

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TEACHER PREPARATION--WHAT GRADUATES TELL US

Increasingly, those individuals and institutions working with teachers-to-be are feeling and assuming responsibility for the performance of their graduates. Recognizing that teaching success is often directly proportional to the quality of teacher education preparation, institutions are seeking to measure the effectiveness of their programs. Certainly one measure of an undergraduate teacher education program is the perceptions of its graduates. After examining a representative sample of evaluative studies of teacher education programs, Baer concluded that feedback from graduates is being used with increasing frequency as a major source of information and that nearly all studies recommend that program evaluations utilize information gathered from graduates.[1]

Although many of the findings in Baer's review of some sixteen major studies (see bibliography) had particular significance for the school or program being evaluated, there were several recurring themes or common grievances voiced by graduates. Among those mentioned most often were unnecessary subject matter duplication, wide gaps between theory and practice as well as between what instructors said should be done and what they actually did, and suggestions for longer and broader student teaching experiences.[2]

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[1]G. Thomas Baer, "An Evaluation of the Northern Illinois University Undergraduate Elementary Education Program Based on the Opinions of a Selected Group of Its Graduates" (unpublished Doctor's dissertation, Northern Illinois University, 1973) pp. 16-35.

[2]Baer, p. 35.

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In a recent study Baer sought to determine how elementary education majors from one university perceived the effectiveness of their undergraduate professional preparation for teaching. The responses from 390 graduates revealed that they shared the following opinions:

1. Courses and experiences that provided opportunities for observing and working with children were valued most highly.

2. Student teaching was rated as the course or experience of greatest value.

3. Graduates felt completely unprepared for the teaching of ecology, sex education, and drug education.

4. The need for more and better instruction in the teaching of reading, science, and social studies was pronounced.

5. Graduates felt better prepared to identify and meet the needs of average students than gifted or slow students.

6. Student teaching at more than one grade level would have been of greater value. (350 of the 390 respondents did their student teaching at only one grade level.)

7. Graduates felt that only about one-third of their professional education instructors usually used a variety of teaching methods and procedures.[3]

A follow-up study of 490 seniors in elementary education completing their final professional semester was conducted using

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[3]Baer, pp. 102-107.

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Baer's questionnaire.[4] Results quite similar to Baer's findings were obtained:

1. Students rated as most valuable student teaching, other laboratory experiences, and outdoor education experiences.

2. Methods courses considered most valuable included instruction in the teaching of reading and the other language arts, instruction in mathematics, and a seminar dealing with problems of the beginning teacher.

3. Instructional areas which students felt were inadequately covered were reading and the other language arts (even though what instruction they did have they considered most valuable), science, and social studies.

4. Competencies in which students felt most inadequate included the teaching of ecology, sex education, and drug education.

5. Forty-three percent of the respondents did their student teaching at more than one grade level, and practically all of them (95%) felt that this was advantageous. Of the fifty-seven percent who taught at one grade level only, more than half (52%) felt that they would have benefited from teaching at more than one level.

6. Less than half (42%) of the respondents stated that their professional education instructors usually used a variety of teaching methods and procedures.[5]

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[4]Olive M. Kimball and Charles A. Sloan, "Attitudes of Senior Students Toward Their Curriculum in Elementary Education: A Survey (1972-73)" Department of Elementary Education, Northern Illinois University, July, 1973.

[5]Kimball and Sloan, pp. 6-19.

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Those who work with prospective teachers and who really want to improve their programs will listen to and learn from students who have completed programs of teacher education. Among conclusions and recommendations that might be drawn from the expressed perceptions and attitudes of graduates are these:

1. Courses or experiences that provide opportunities to work with children should be increased. Because of the high regard that graduates place on experiences where contact with children is concerned, consideration should be given to beginning planned observations and participatory activities as early as the freshman year.

2. Greater emphasis should be placed on the teaching of reading, social studies, and science.

3. Provision should be made for preparing teachers to teach ecology, sex education, and drug education.

4. Consideration should be given to allowing more variety in student teaching. Options might be established to allow student teachers some choice in the length of assignment and in the number of grade levels.

5. Practice and theory should be brought closer together. Teacher education institutions must go beyond theory and attempt to put into practice the teaching innovations now found in the elementary schools.

6. College instructors must show (not just tell) students how to use innovative teaching techniques and procedures. They must "practice what they preach."

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